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Articles in Today's Clips Monday, August 14, 2006

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August 14, 2006

Michigan doesn't need feds' foster care oversight

Give new director's reforms more time to take root

Michigan's foster care system is in need of further reform. Even defenders of the state agency acknowledge this, but federal oversight isn't the answer.

That's what a New York children's advocacy group wants. Children's Rights filed a federal lawsuit last week against the Michigan Department of Human Services for what it says is a systematic failure to protect children in state custody in Michigan.

The group, which has filed similar lawsuits in at least a dozen other states, wants a federal judge to oversee the department. It wants more money pumped into the system and more people working to ensure that children who are in protective custody are safe.

We all want that, but adding a layer of bureaucracy onto bureaucracy isn't likely to solve the problem quickly, if at all. New Mexico last year got out from under a lawsuit Children's Rights filed against it in 1980.

Three years ago, New Jersey's system was placed under federal oversight. The state has spent an additional \$300 million, but is revising its timetable for changes because the original plan wasn't realistic.

Children's Rights' complaint against Michigan says the 19,000 foster kids in the state are suffering and not getting the physical or mental care they need. The complaint also says they are moved from home to home too many times.

While that has been the case in the past, Marianne Udow, director of the Human Services department, says the lawsuit doesn't take into consideration the reforms she's implemented in the two-and-a-half years she's been in charge.

She says the average number of placements a foster child experiences is two and that 2,800 (of the 6,300) children are adopted each year.

Udow wisely asked for immediate talks to settle the case before a lengthy and expensive trial is started. She aptly points out that the money that will be spent sifting through the allegations would be better spent on programs for children.

Reaching an agreement quickly will help her continue the changes she's made. Michigan is one of five states that can use its federal funds for early intervention and prevention measures, in addition to foster care.

And Udow says she's made a concerted effort to keep children from being moved repeatedly and tries to find solutions where they can stay with relatives.

Are there problems? Sure, but some instances of abuse are impossible to protect against. That doesn't excuse those cases, but it also isn't an indictment of the system.

Settling this matter before the department is subject to decades of federal oversight is the best way to protect children in Michigan.

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Brown Bag campaign aids foster children

By ERICA KOLASKI

Tribune Staff Writer

CHEBOYGAN - Area residents will see something a little different in today's newspaper, a small reminder that children entering the state's foster care program have little more than the belongings they can fit into a brown paper bag.

The Brown Bag campaign, now in its 17th year, again urges readers of Northern Michigan newspapers to help children who are entering foster care through Child and Family Services, said agency spokeswoman Gina Aranki.

"Readers will find a small brown paper bag imprinted with that message of heartbreak as well as of hope - that the care of individuals can truly make a difference in the life of a child whose beginning has been less than ideal," she said.

A small brown paper bag is inserted in area newspapers in Northern Michigan, providing an avenue for residents to donate to the plight of foster children. Those who wish to make a donation to Child and Family Services can place a contribution in the bag, stamp it, and mail it, said Aranki.

Carl and Penny Jana of Cheboygan are currently the foster parents of four children. The family has been foster parents since 2003, and adopted their first foster son, 9-year-old Dominic, in 2004.

"We chose foster care because we wanted a large family," said Penny Jana. "We knew that there were children that needed our help, and this is our way of giving back to the children what we enjoy so much about them."

Jana said that she came from a large family, with nine brothers and sisters total.

"After I had my son, we learned that we would be unable to have anymore children," she said. The Janas are the biological parents of 19-year-old Derek and 20-year-old Alicia.

"We really enjoy being foster parents," Jana continued. "We look forward to the calls that we get, and we like to get them."

She said that the Brown Bag campaign "always helps."

"When kids come into foster care, this program helps gives them something to call

their own. They tend to get attached to it really fast,” she said.

Jana said that she has run a full-time daycare for the past 24 years, but will soon be transferring over to full time foster care.

“The Brown Bag campaign not only raises money for kids in need right here in our community,” said Jim Scherrer, executive director of Child and Family Services, “It calls attention to the vital need for people who have room in their hearts and their homes to become foster and adoptive parents. As the number of children in foster care grows, the number of available, licensed foster homes must grow too.”

In its 16 years, the campaign has raised more than \$120,000 for these needs, he said.

Aranki said that Child and Family Services averages about 180 children a day in out-of-home placement. Children can be placed in foster care because of abuse, neglect or delinquency, and range in age from newborn to 18 years.

For more information on the Brown Bag campaign, or on how to become a licensed foster parent, call Child and Family Services at 946-8975.



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Foster parents getting organized

Updated 8/14/2006 10:39 AM ET

By John Ritter, USA TODAY

OLYMPIA, Wash. — In 18 years as foster parents, Steve and Daniele Baxter have seen drug-addicted newborns taken from strung-out moms; angry, abusive teenagers; kids bounced from home to home a dozen times or more; suicidal kids; sexually aggressive kids; slow learners; adolescent bed-wetters — you name it.

The couple also has seen — and this refrain is heard across the USA — inadequate support from child-welfare agencies, high turnover of foster parents, meager training in caring for severely troubled children, erratic reimbursement for kids' needs and, most troubling, a bureaucratic deaf ear to foster parents' opinions.

"Nobody really fully understands what being a foster parent is unless you are a foster parent and you actually live it," Daniele Baxter says. "Anyone who ever makes a decision about foster children should have a foster child for a while."

The Baxters and others, convinced that Washington state's foster-care system is "in crisis," are forming the nation's first union representing foster parents to gain more clout with state agencies. By January, organizers expect to have a proposal before the Legislature, which must approve any new group of unionized state employees.

Foster parents want more training, a role in foster-care decision-making and benefits such as health coverage. They want a portion of parents in Washington state's 6,000 foster homes to become paid professionals who house difficult and medically fragile children. The state pays its volunteer foster parents for kids' expenses but not wages.

"The debate is if we treat foster parents like employees or businesses, somehow the kids automatically do better," says Republican state Sen. Joseph Zarelli. "But I'd argue that to become a foster parent you ought to first be financially stable in your own home."

Mike Canfield, a foster parent with his wife, Beth, in Bremerton, says fewer than 100 homes can handle "high-risk children."

"If a foster parent doesn't know how to take care of a kid like that, they can make things worse," says Canfield, a psychologist who has been a foster parent for 23 years.

Fewer homes available

The push for a union isn't coming out of a sense that Washington's system lags the rest of the country. Reimbursement rates here are above the national average, and the state is considered as progressive as any, according to the National Foster Parent Association.

Like many other states, Washington has been putting more foster children in relatives' homes — 38% last year, the Department of Social and Health Services says. A larger proportion of the remaining cases are

harder-to-manage children. The state has about 9,500 foster children but 400 fewer foster homes than a year ago.

"A lot of foster parents feel poorly treated by the state. It's been a long-standing problem," says Dee Wilson, executive director of the Northwest Institute for Children and Families at the University of Washington and for many years a child-welfare administrator. "Lots of times they don't have a say in what happens to kids in their home, even though they know more about the kids than anyone else."

Foster-care systems are "dysfunctional" in many states, says Marcia Lowry, executive director of Children's Rights, an advocacy group.

Virginia was penalized \$42 million this year when an audit found cities and counties improperly diverting federal foster-care funds. A state audit in June found that abuse increased after Florida privatized its child-welfare system. A federal judge in May struck down Missouri's law cutting aid to foster parents. The state is appealing.

"In state after state, foster parents are paid way below the rate the U.S. government sets for the cost of raising a child," Lowry says.

Her group won settlements in Connecticut; Tennessee; New Jersey; Washington, D.C.; Atlanta; and Milwaukee. Class-action lawsuits are pending in Mississippi, Michigan and Nebraska, whose \$222-a-month base rate is the nation's lowest.

The federal government oversees states' foster care and matches their spending on children eligible under a formula. Since 1998, the number of children eligible for the federal match has fallen "at an alarming rate," from 55% to 45% in 2004, the Child Welfare League of America said in a study released in July.

The league found 22 states not complying with eligibility rules. In federal audits since 2001 looking at abuse levels, parent turnover, placement, foster-child adoptions and other measures, no state has passed. However, many have shown "significant improvement" since, says Wade Horn, an assistant secretary in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Year to year, about a half-million children are in foster care, the government estimates.

Most foster parents are middle-aged or older and have less education than parents in general. Nearly half are single, and more than 90% of those are women. African-Americans make up the biggest share of foster parents, 42%, according to a 2003 federal study.

State seeks solutions, too

Washington state officials know that too many kids see too many homes, that foster-parent turnover — 30% last year — is too high and that parents want a greater role, says Kathleen Spears, a Social and Health Services spokeswoman.

The department is trying to recruit more parents in places with a lot of foster children so a child, if moved, can stay in the same school, Spears says. "We're moving toward more involvement from children's families, whether foster parents or relatives," she says.

Lawmaker Zarelli wants the state to set clearer expectations for parents who lose their children and timetables by which they would have to straighten up or have the state move toward severing parental rights and permitting adoption.

Democratic state Rep. Ruth Kagi chairs the House Children and Family Services Committee and says she favors "every possible initiative to support foster parents," possibly including "a professional level of foster care that we need to look at."

She's not sure a union is the answer, though, and says linking foster issues with the need to engage biological parents more vigorously "makes no sense."

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http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2006-08-14-foster-parents-organized_x.htm

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Trial delayed in Ricky Holland murder case

BY JACK KRESNAK

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

August 14, 2006

The Michigan Court of Appeals has delayed the September murder trial of Tim Holland who, along with his wife Lisa, is charged in the killing last summer of their 7-year-old son, Ricky.

The appellate court's action likely will result in a delay in the trial for Lisa Holland, too, lawyers involved in the case said.

The three-judge appeals panel of Alton Davis, Patrick Meter and Stephen Borrello agreed on Thursday to hear Tim Holland's appeal of Ingham County Circuit Court Judge Paula Manderfield's earlier decision to allow Holland's statements to police in January.

A lower court judge, Rosemarie Aquilina in 55th District Court, earlier had ruled that Holland's statements made shortly before he led police to the boy's body could not be used against him because they were made during a plea bargaining agreement.

Manderfield, however, said the statements could be used as evidence because Tim Holland had not been charged yet.

The appeals court panel said it would consider in October whether the statements can be used at Tim Holland's trial and, therefore, it was delaying the trial to decide the issue.

Both Hollands were to be tried together before separate juries with jury selection beginning on Sept. 11.

Frank Reynolds said a so-called interlocutory appeal during a criminal proceeding is rare.

"They are not granted very often," Reynolds said Monday. "This issue I thought was important enough that we needed some clarification from the Court of Appeals."

Assistant Ingham County Prosecutor Mike Ferency said Monday that the delay probably will mean a delay in Lisa Holland's trial, too, although that will be up to Judge Manderfield.

"There is a very significant likelihood with the stay being granted in one case that we're now going to seek Court of Appeals intervention on the suppression of 38 minutes of Lisa Holland's statements," Ferency said.

Judge Manderfield had ruled last month that a good portion of Lisa Holland's recorded statements to police could not be used because her attorney, Andrew Abood, was at the jail trying to see her. Delays prevented Abood from seeing Lisa Holland until after she had made a statement about what she knew about Ricky's death.

Ferency said prosecutors were ready to proceed to trial without the 38 minutes but, now that Tim Holland's trial is postponed, his office likely will file a request to the appellate panel to hear the prosecution's request to use that portion of Lisa Holland's statements.

Abood could not be immediately reached Monday.

A motion hearing is set for Friday before Judge Manderfield at which the delay will undoubtedly be discussed.

"I will say it will be a lively subject of conversation on Friday," Ferency said.

The parents remain jailed on charges of felony murder and first-degree child abuse in the death of their adoptive son, Ricky, in July 2005. The boy's skeletal remains were not found until January.

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Autopsy of Burned Body is Complete

By 7 Action News Team
August 14, 2006

A Detroit family could learn whether a badly burned body is that of their missing girl. Authorities will announce the results of DNA testing Monday.



An investigator searches a Romulus field where the burned body of a girl was found early last week.

7-year-old Raven Jeffries disappeared more than a week ago while playing near her home on Detroit's west side.

Three days after Jeffries vanished, a body of a child was found in a field in Romulus. The body was badly burned and so DNA samples were taken to identify the victim found in the field.

The missing girl's family has maintained hope that Raven Jeffries will still be found alive.

Police continue their investigation into the girl's disappearance. They have interviewed several people, but have yet to name any suspects.

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DNA Results Expected In Raven Jeffries Investigation

Police To Determine If Body Found In Romulus Is Missing Girl

POSTED: 8:59 am EDT August 14, 2006

Police are expected to reveal DNA results on Monday of the burned body of a girl found in Romulus last week.

A Detroit family continues to pray that the child is not their missing daughter, 7-year-old Raven Jeffries.

Raven was last seen on McDonald Street in southwest Detroit outside the front door of her home at about 7 p.m. on Aug. 4, according to police and Local 4 reports. Police said on Friday that they may now have a suspect in mind in her disappearance, Local 4 reported.

Investigators served at least two search warrants in the city of Taylor in connection with the girl's disappearance, Local 4 reported. Employees at Metro Storage in Taylor said police spent several hours at the site and left at about 3 a.m. Friday with evidence, the station reported.

Police continue to investigate a connection between Raven and the discovery of the body. Investigators said the clothing of the girl found dead matched Raven's clothing, according to the child's friends. Police also examined Raven's baby teeth and bedding in their investigation.

Another candlelight vigil was held for Raven by family and friends on Sunday night.

Mother accused of beating 3-year-old daughter to death

WWMT-TV Kalamazoo

August 11, 2006 - 8:47AM

ANN ARBOR (AP) - A Washtenaw County woman accused of killing her three-year-old daughter has been ordered to stand trial on murder charges.

Twenty-nine-year-old LaToya Joplin of Ypsilanti Township has been charged with open murder, felony murder and first-degree child abuse in the death of Kayla Joplin.

The young girl died last month from a torn right atrium in her heart.

Prosecutors say that the child died after receiving a beating from her mother.

Joplin's defense attorney says his client is innocent and that investigators have railroaded a grieving woman.

If convicted of felony murder, Joplin could face a mandatory sentence of life in prison with no parole.

Joplin is being held in jail. A pretrial hearing is set for September 21st.



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Published August 13, 2006

Mother, boyfriend charged with torturing her son, 6

Police say pair duct-taped boy into painful positions, beat him

Associated Press

JACKSON - The mother of a 6-year-old boy and her boyfriend have been charged with beating the child, duct-taping him into painful positions and making him stand on his toes until he collapsed.

Jeannie Marie Nyies, 30, and her boyfriend, Ian Anderson, 32, both of Jackson, were charged in warrants with first-degree child abuse and felony torture, which is punishable by life in prison under a state law enacted March 1.

They were jailed Friday pending arraignment.

The alleged abuse was discovered when a relative called police Wednesday, Chief Assistant Prosecutor Mark Blumer told The Jackson Citizen Patriot. The boy was hospitalized and will be returned to his biological father.

The boy was beaten with kitchen utensils until his skin fell off in places, Blumer said.

The boy was so scared of Anderson that he tiptoed around the house to avoid offending him.

"He saw him tiptoeing and made him stand on his toes for an hour, until he collapsed," Blumer said.

The couple also used duct tape to hold the boy in painful positions for extensive periods, police allege.

"Even veteran investigators and social workers were appalled at the horrendous violence," Blumer said.

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Couple charged with abuse

Saturday, August 12, 2006

By Scott Hagen

shagen@citpat.com -- 768-4929

A little boy one relative described as a kid "you just want to hug" is recovering from injuries he suffered through torture at the hands of his mother and her boyfriend, police said Friday.

Jeannine Nyies, 30, and Ian Anderson, 32, were charged Friday with torturing the 6-year-old and with first-degree child abuse. They will remain in jail in lieu of a \$100,000 bond.

Police and prosecutors say the couple spanked the boy with a spatula so hard that it tore the skin from his body. They allegedly beat him and duct-taped him into awkward and uncomfortable positions. Once, they forced him to stand on his tip-toes until he collapsed, authorities say.

Police responded to an anonymous phone call Wednesday night and found the boy with extensive injuries at their house, 363 Carr St. He was taken to Foote Hospital for treatment. His condition was unavailable Friday.

The disturbing case sent chatter rippling through the police department and prosecutor's office.

"I was told by the child protection investigator she had to get up and leave the room after a while because what the child was describing was making her sick," Chief Assistant Prosecutor Mark Blumer said.

"It's quite shocking and very disturbing to those people involved."

It's unclear how long the couple may have abused the boy. The prosecutor's office is awaiting medical tests that could provide details as to the length of alleged abuse.

"It was not a one-day event," Blumer said.

The couple could face life in prison if convicted. The boy was turned over to his biological father.

Alvin Powell, the mother's uncle, said the 6-year-old was a sweet child who loved to play and loved the movies "Shrek," and "Ice Age."

He said Nyies and Anderson have dated for about nine months.

The boy told relatives details of how his mother and her boyfriend treated him, Powell said.

He told his grandmother he was left in a dark basement for four hours, tied up and gagged, and feared spiders because his mother and Anderson told him the creatures lived in the basement, Powell said.

"I don't understand what would bring or possess a person to do that to a kid. ! Nobody needs to live like that," he said.

Anderson and Nyies will appear in District Court on Aug. 23 for a preliminary examination.

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Article published Aug 13, 2006

While baby is home, dad waits in jail on charges

While Denise Rader gently rocks her tiny daughter in their Conant Ave. home, she lightly touches the two small marks on top of the infant's head.

The barely noticeable spots are where doctors drilled holes to relieve pressure where blood had collected.

Now baby Joishea, born June 17, is home after spending 12 days in the hospital.

"She's doing great," Ms. Rader said. "She's healthy. She's fine."

How Joishea was stricken with the injury that led to the procedure is being debated in the legal world. Ms. Rader believes her daughter suffered some type of injury at birth after a difficult pregnancy and delivery.

But police and some doctors have a far different opinion. They believe the baby's father, Antoine Adolphues, harmed the child by shaking her. While Ms. Rader cares for their daughter at home, Mr. Adolphues sits in jail unable to get out due to a \$500,000 bond. He has been charged with first-degree child abuse.

"I would never shake a child," Mr. Adolphues said during an interview at the Monroe County jail. "I would never do nothin' like that. I could never get that frustrated. It's just a baby."

Monroe County Assistant Prosecutor Allison Arnold said there is strong medical evidence that suggests Joishea was injured while in the care of her father. While many infants die of shaken baby syndrome, many others survive, often with physical disabilities.

Ms. Arnold said first-degree child abuse, which carries a maximum

penalty of 15 years in prison, is when someone knowingly and intentionally causes severe physical or psychological harm to a child.

While she declined to detail her evidence because the case is pending, Ms. Arnold said she is pursuing the criminal case against Mr. Adolphues even if it appears the baby might be doing well.

"We're moving forward," she said.

But Ms. Rader strongly supports Mr. Adolphues. Although they are engaged to be married, both often refer to each other as husband and wife. They are the biological parents of Joishea, and Ms. Rader said her fiancée has helped raise her other four other children in the home. She said he would never harm the baby.

"If this were shaken baby syndrome she would not be alive," Ms. Rader said. "My husband is in jail for nothin'."

On July 20, Mr. Adolphues was taking care of Joishea when she began crying. He said he tried to give her some milk, but she started choking. He said he patted her on the back and lightly bounced her on his knee.

He said then the baby started clenching her fists like a ball and putting them to her face.

"Then she just went limp," he said. "She was unresponsive. Her eyes never opened. I didn't know what to do."

Ms. Rader said she came home and Mr. Adolphues immediately told her what was happening.

"She just couldn't open her eyes," Ms. Rader said. "At first I thought she was just sleeping. But she wasn't waking up."

They took her to Mercy Memorial Hospital and doctors and nurses immediately began working on the baby, who was 33 days old at the time. They closed the curtain and would not let either parent watch, they said.

Mr. Adolphues said he immediately felt an air of suspicion.

"We already got looks and stares," he said. "It was like a cold shoulder.

They were already suspicious."

Before Joishea could be loaded into the helicopter and flown to Toledo, the police were at the hospital. As Joishea was being rushed to St. Vincent Mercy Medical Center in Toledo, the couple was interviewed separately.

Mr. Adolphues said the police did not believe his story and arrested him. They repeated that their baby was on the verge of death.

"The whole time I was crying," Mr. Adolphues said. "I couldn't believe it."

Ms. Rader said she is certain that whatever happened to Joishea that day was related to her birth. During the late stages of her pregnancy, Ms. Rader was in and out of the hospital with early contractions and bleeding. Her water partially broke.

During birth, the baby was breach and would not come out. She said the cord was wrapped around the baby's neck. Doctors decided to deliver the baby with an emergency Caesarean section. Afterward, Ms. Rader said she noticed redness on top of her daughter's head.

"I thought it was a birthmark," she said.

While Joishea barely cried during her first weeks of life, Ms. Rader said she was not too concerned. Then, when the baby was about 2 weeks old, she noticed some blood coming out of her nose.

They took her to the hospital and a CT scan was done. Doctors told her it was thrush, a common infection among infants, and sent them home. Two weeks later, the baby's health worsened while on Mr. Adolphues' watch. The charges eventually were filed.

While being cared for, Ms. Rader insists doctors never diagnosed Joishea with having bruises, neck injuries or any broken bones. Doctors discovered excess blood had collected on her brain and it had to be drained. Once the procedure was over, Joishea quickly recovered, her mother said.

But in a police report, Dr. Randall Schlievert, a St. Vincent physician who specializes in shaken baby syndrome cases, said the injuries Joishea suffered were consistent with child abuse.

Reached by phone, Dr. Schlievert said he could not comment on the case because it is pending.

On Aug. 1, Joishea was released and brought home. Ms. Rader said her daughter is doing well. She said she has no reason to believe that Joishea will not lead a normal life.

"She's back to normal," Ms. Rader said. "Thank God my daughter's alive."

Meanwhile, Mr. Adolphues waits in jail for his next court date. On Aug. 24, his attorney, Joshua Sacks of Temperance, Ms. Arnold and a judge will decide on a date to hold a hearing to see if the defendant should stand trial on child abuse charges.

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Child-rape deal alleged

Charges say man had a contract for sex

BY CECIL ANGEL
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

August 12, 2006

In a case that shocked authorities in a small western Michigan city, a man stands accused of striking a deal for sex not only with the 14-year-old daughter of his girlfriend -- who police say offered the girl to him while she recovered from surgery -- but with his own 12-year-old daughter.

"I've never seen anything like this before. Parents aren't supposed to do something like this," Calvin Mahan, a detective with the Muskegon Heights police, said Friday.

Because the Free Press does not publish the names of the alleged victims of sex crimes, the man and woman are not being identified to protect the identities of the two children.

According to authorities, the 37-year-old man's girlfriend persuaded her daughter to sign a contract obligating the then-14-year-old girl to have sex with him in exchange for clothing and body piercings. Police said the woman was worried the man would dump her while she was recovering from tummy tuck surgery.

Authorities said the mother, daughter and the man all signed the contract. The man and the girl allegedly had sex about 20 times from June 6 to July 15, during which time she turned 15 years old.

"Basically, mom was pimping out her daughter," Mahan said.

On Friday, Mahan said authorities also learned that the man had given his own daughter -- who had been staying with him after living with her biological mother -- packs of cigarettes for sex. According to the Muskegon County Prosecutor's Office, the man had sex with his daughter from sometime in November of last year to July 15.

In the case involving his daughter, the man is charged with six counts of first-degree criminal sexual conduct with a child under age 13; in the other case, he is

charged with six counts of third-degree criminal sexual conduct with a child 13-15 years old.

If convicted on the charges involving his daughter, the man could be sentenced to life in prison; for those involving his daughter's girlfriend, he could serve up to 15 years in prison if convicted.

Meanwhile, the girl's mother has been charged with three counts of aiding and abetting third-degree criminal sexual conduct with a child 13-15 years old. She was freed on a \$25,000 bond after being arraigned Tuesday. She could face 15 years in prison if convicted.

Her children, including a son and another daughter, were removed from her home.

"It's outrageous to think that a mother could sign a contract for her underage daughter to have sex with an adult male," said Muskegon County Prosecutor Tony Tague.

Contact **CECIL ANGEL** at 313-223-4531 or angel@freepress.com.

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DETROIT FREE PRESS EDITORIALS

SATURDAY STARTERS: Some points you can raise to get a conversation flowing this weekend

August 12, 2006

Gross parental irresponsibility

Just when you think you've heard it all comes the story from Muskegon about the 37-year-old woman who was afraid she'd lose her boyfriend while recovering from surgery so she signed a deal for her 15-year-old daughter to have sex with the guy over a two-month period. The girl received some clothes and body piercings for her part in this sordid saga before she told another adult about it and authorities paid a visit. The boyfriend, also 37, is now in jail and could be facing life in prison; the mom is out on bond on charges that could mean 15 years. And the child is desperately in need of a responsible role model.

Cassopolis man charged in child abuse, fireworks case

Saturday, August 12, 2006

By William R. Wood
bwood@kalamazoogazette.com 388-8549

Alan Jay Westfall, 44, of Cassopolis, was charged with child abuse in the second degree and possession and use of illegal fireworks Friday by Cass County Prosecutor Victor Fitz.

The charges were the result of an incident on July 19 at 26431 Yankee St. in Jefferson Township in which a 15-month-old infant suffered serious burns on the face, chest and arms.

The child-abuse charge carries a maximum sentence of 4 years in jail. The illegal fireworks charges carries a maximum sentence of 90 days in jail or a \$500 fine.



Man pleads guilty to CSC charge

Saturday, August 12, 2006

ALLEGAN COUNTY -- James Rupert, 27, pleaded guilty Friday to one count of first-degree criminal sexual conduct and will be sentenced Sept. 29. He was initially charged with multiple counts of sexual assault. Allegan County sheriff's detectives said several children from two families were abused in an Allegan-area home for years. Seven children, ranging from 11 months to 9 years, lived in the residence, where police say they seized 20,000 images of child pornography taken with a digital camera. Rupert's father, Ronald Rupert, 56, earlier was sentenced to prison for sexual assault in connection with the abuse. James Rupert's wife, Melissa Rupert, 26, has been charged with child abuse and being an accessory to a felony.

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Published August 13, 2006

Jim Paparella: Angel House is more than a shelter

Jim Paparella is executive director of Child & Family Services-Capital Area, the parent agency for Angel House.

Recent publicity about Angel House, especially the August 6 guest editorial ("Find a new role for Angel House") by two out-of-state college professors, opened the debate about the need for emergency shelter services for abused and neglected children.

For child advocates, especially those who witness how children enter the foster care system, there is no argument. These children are removed from their home under crisis conditions without advanced planning. They often wait long hours in offices, lobbies, or cars before a relative or foster home can be located. When a home is located, placements are rushed with minimal regard for the child's trauma and no time for effective preparation and assessment of the child and the appropriateness of the home.

It is that tragic condition which led to the development of Angel House. Angel House provides immediate, centralized and coordinated services in a child-friendly, homelike environment with caregivers who are experienced and trained to work with abused children.

Services include emergency shelter, trauma therapy, medical care, assessment of child and family needs, and placement planning. Angel House is not just a shelter. Forensic interviews, counseling services, and support groups are provided to children and non-offending family members.

The Michigan Department of Human Services recently shifted in philosophy away from supporting shelter care.

While we applaud the new emphasis on family-centered and home-based care, we believe shelters play an important role in the full continuum of services needed for abused children and their families - a position supported by the Child Welfare League of America and the Michigan Federation for Children and Families.

Our early experiences at Angel House have confirmed what we expected.

Children have entered traumatized and exhausted. They have left with a sense of stability, direction, normalcy, and love. We cannot fathom a more positive and proactive experience for abused children as they begin their journey of healing. And given that Angel House supports and enhances the new family preservation model of foster care, the reduction and possible elimination of public funding for shelter services smacks of cost cutting maneuvers packaged as "best

practice."

Finally, Angel House was born out of a seven-year communitywide planning process involving a large number of child welfare agencies, political and judicial leaders, frontline workers, as well as thousands of contributors and volunteers. Careful consideration was given to child abuse trends, the needs of child victims, gaps in services, and how to broker both private and public dollars to bring vision to fruition.

We believe the people of mid-Michigan have more faith in the wisdom of local child advocates than the distorted views from academia and administrators far removed from the realities of child protection work.

While Michigan's child welfare department searches for a panacea to keep families intact, and unless or until dollars stop driving decisions on what's best for kids, our community of stakeholders, champions, and donors will ensure that Angel House will forever remain a beacon for our most vulnerable children.

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MONDAY AUGUST 14, 2006 Last modified: *Saturday, August 12, 2006 10:21 PM EDT*

Police give man ride, then arrest him

From staff reports

TECUMSEH — Tecumseh police arrested an Owosso man wanted by Arizona authorities for child abuse — two days after giving him a ride to a friend's house.

According to a report released Friday, an officer picked up Eric Joseph Natzel, 27, at 3:05 a.m. Aug. 2 after seeing him walking along West Russell Road near Adrian Street. Natzel told the officer he had been drinking and was trying to get to a residence on West Shawnee Street. The officer gave him a ride, and shortly after they got to the house, Natzel's friend, Heather Ann Hall, 32, drove up in her car. Before letting Natzel out of the patrol car the officer asked Hall if he was supposed to be there, and she said he was, so he left him there.

Officers then checked Hall's license plate on an in-car computer, and records indicated her driver's license was suspended, according to the report. They returned to the house and asked her if she was aware her license was suspended. She told them she was not. They wrote her a ticket for driving while license suspended, released her on personal recognizance bond and gave her a court date.

While writing the report of Hall's arrest on Aug. 4, an officer learned through the National Criminal Information Center that authorities in Maricopa County, Arizona, had issued a two-count child abuse warrant for Natzel with a \$500,000 bond, police said. After confirming the warrant was valid and that Arizona would extradite Natzel, the officer took him into custody and lodged him at the Lenawee County Jail.

-- CLOSE WINDOW--



JPS: Accused driver had no problems at job

Saturday, August 12, 2006

By Scott Hagen

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Jackson Public Schools officials say a school bus driver accused Thursday of possessing thousands of sexual pictures of young boys was a good employee who had no history of reported problems.

In a statement Friday, the district said 57-year-old Steven Flick spent his 18 full-time years as a bus driver, starting in 1977, and his brief stint as a substitute driver without incident.

A'Lynne Robinson, the district's director of community relations, said Flick was removed from employment May 18 when the district learned of a joint federal and local investigation.

Police raided Flick's house in the 3000 block of Blue Lane in Summit Township and say they found thousands of sexual pictures of young boys.

Flick taught private piano lessons from his home, directed choir at First Baptist Church and mentored young children as part of Big Brothers & Big Sisters of Jackson County.

Kyle Jansen, executive director of the local branch of Big Brothers & Big Sisters, said all potential volunteers go through a rigorous background check, including national, state and local criminal record searches. All volunteers must also present references to secure a position with the nonprofit agency.

Church officials could not be reached for comment.

Flick is facing one count of possessing child pornography and one count of using a computer to commit a crime. He is scheduled to appear in court Aug. 21 for his preliminary examination, where prosecutors must present enough evidence to bring the case to trial.

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BRIAN DICKERSON: Fearmongers still feed on sex offender anxiety

BY BRIAN DICKERSON
FREE PRESS COLUMNIST

August 14, 2006

Michigan's online sex-offender registry is a grab bag of 39,000 residents prosecuted for everything from teenage promiscuity to violent sexual assault.

A bipartisan panel of Michigan legislators has been studying ways to make the registry more like the useful parental resource its inventors envisioned and less like the unwieldy instrument of persecution it has become.

But progress has been slow, and even as Lansing dawdles, local politicians are riding the public's anxiety over pedophilia to new heights of legislative lunacy.

The newest outbreak occurred last week in Warren, where City Council members directed their staff to draft an ordinance barring anyone on Michigan's sex-offender registry from the city's 20 public parks and two community recreation centers.

Sponsor Mindy Moore, a former Warren school board member elected to the City Council in 2003, says the park ban would supplement existing travel restrictions that prohibit registered sex offenders from venturing within 1,000 feet of a school.

Moore isn't the first politician to figure that few constituents will object to any new burden on people labeled as sex offenders, no matter how illogical or impractical to enforce. But I was astonished how little she knew about the 39,000 Michigan residents whose movements she proposes to restrict.

Moore uses the terms "child predator" and "registered sex offender" interchangeably, although most law enforcement officials agree that predators account for only a small percentage of registrants. In a phone interview Saturday, Moore said she had no idea how many people are on Michigan's registry, or what proportion have targeted minors.

"We can debate all day who should be on the sex-offender list," Moore said. "But my concern is who should be hanging around our parks." When I pointed out that most of those affected by Warren's park ban aren't considered child molesters, she

responded: "If we can deter one predator from going to the park, it's worth it."

It's hard to think of *any* restriction that couldn't be justified with that sort of sweeping rationalization. Why stop at parks and schools? Should sex offenders who can't go within 1,000 feet of a baseball diamond be free to patronize ice cream parlors frequented by Little Leaguers? Should shopping malls and pizza parlors be off-limits? What about churches that provide meeting space for scout troops, or public libraries frequented by students after school hours?

In fact, many of those listed on Michigan's registry are nonviolent offenders at negligible risk of recidivism. Thousands are former youthful offenders trying to get on with normal lives despite restrictions that preclude them from attending their own children's parent-teacher conferences and make it difficult to find or retain jobs.

Moore and her kindred fearmongers offer no evidence that the restrictions they propose are cost-effective or narrowly tailored to protect children. The Warren City Council should rethink the park ban before the courts scuttle it on constitutional grounds.

Contact **BRIAN DICKERSON** at 248-351-3697 or dicker@freepress.com.

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Abuse investigators hone techniques

Monday, August 14, 2006

JILL ARMENTROUT

THE SAGINAW NEWS

In an effort that got its start in Saginaw County, state police will begin training child protection workers this fall to improve interview techniques used to evaluate whether abuse has occurred.

About 50 county social workers, administrators and state officials attended a pilot training session in June in Saginaw, said Randy Barst, executive director of the Saginaw County Department of Human Services.

Capt. Daniel J. Miller, commander of the State Police Third District, based in Saginaw, conducted the session.

"It was very good," Barst said. "I worked for 10 years in protective services and never had such concrete examples of how to interview people. This is a significant breakthrough."

Department of Human Services Director Marianne Udow and State Police Director Col. Peter Munoz said all protective services workers should undergo the training by the end of next year.

Law enforcement will provide social workers with more detailed evidence checklists to use in homes where allegations of abuse occur, along with training on how to conduct interviews and write reports.

"Investigations are a very important part of the job," Barst said. "You have to make sure you are getting the truth before you decide how to help. We've always worked with law enforcement, but historically we learned on the job."

Law enforcement personnel have used a variety of techniques to determine deception over the years, but it's also a basic part of communication that workers can hone, Miller said.

"Everyone does it by picking up clues unconsciously. This training brings it to a conscious level."

Protective services workers conduct more than 75,000 investigations of abuse and neglect each year, which breaks down to about 100 cases a year for each worker.

Munoz said collaboration between the police and Department of Human Services is a natural partnership. All child protection workers must take the training.

Jill Armentrout is a features writer and Neighbors coordinator at The Saginaw News. You may reach her at 776-9681. The Associated Press contributed to this report.

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KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

Is spanking OK if not used in anger, but to teach?

Saturday, August 12, 2006

Sonita Moss

12th grade

Loy Norrix High School

Spanking is controversial. Whether kids are being spanked or being slapped on the back of the head, there is always the underlying question: Is this child abuse? In our culture, it seems to be a common practice to spank small children as discipline. This does not teach children that what they did was wrong. It merely teaches them not to get caught.

Furthermore, you are instilling fear in the child which will hinder your relationship in the future. The point is that you may think you are teaching your child the difference between right and wrong, but usually your anger is what causes you to lash out, not any motivation to be a good parent. Abuse or not, hitting your children is not the only way to discipline them. Try talking to them or taking away privileges before reaching for your belt.

If skin impacting skin is the only way to teach values, we might be in bigger trouble than we previously assumed. On top of that, if your child perceives violence as the only way to vent anger, problems in school could arise. Parents complain constantly about violence on TV and in video games. But are you setting an example of violence through spanking?

Spanking is a clumsy punishment with many negative side effects, emotionally and physically. Maybe parents know it's an easy way to coerce children into submission and that is a sad excuse.

When parenting becomes an excuse to leave scars and bruises on skin, something is way off base. Before you raise your hand, ask yourself, "Is this really something I want to pass on to future generations?" Doubtless, you want to pass things like respect, trust, and love on to your kids. Spanking definitely won't accomplish that.

Erica Brazelton

10th grade

Kal. Christian High School

You see children running frantically in every direction, crying, kicking screaming and whining. Whenever anyone asks them to sit down, they scream, "No!"

In these situations, a person's first thought is: "Where are these kids' manners?" Quite frankly, it's assumed the children lack proper discipline.

When disciplining a child, parents shouldn't focus on how the children are disciplined, but on the fact that that they are, and how it affects their development in adulthood. And when it comes down to it, we'd rather

deal with a respectful, well-mannered person who was disciplined, even if we don't agree with the method.

We like to think of corporal punishment as abuse, but let's not confuse the two. Abuse is excessive harm to the child. Abuse is conspicuous bruises and burns, and there is a definite line between abuse and corporal punishment.

Corporal punishment is a parent's choice, and one based on an individual child. If a child responds to loss of privileges, then spanking isn't necessary. But, not every child learns from that and corporal punishment may be the only way in which to ensure children don't repeat the behavior.

Parents who are afraid of using corporal punishment turn to behavioral medications like Ritalin or parenthood manuals. In 2004, there was a 369 percent increase in ADHD medication prescribed for children under five. Clearly, children with behavioral problems are being misdiagnosed in lieu of simple discipline. And parents are paging through a book every time a child throws a tantrum. Enough, already.

Marginalizing disciplinary methods is marginalizing children. As complicated and difficult as raising a child is, there is no manual with all the answers. When everything is said and done, it really doesn't matter how we come to be decent people -- only that we do.

Marta Robertson

11th grade

Sturgis High School

I got in trouble one time when I was younger. After school, I was supposed to walk half a mile to a daycare to wait for my mother to pick me up after work. One day my friend and I decided to play on the playground instead of going to daycare right away. We had a blast swinging on the tire swing until my mother pulled up, frantic and angry.

My mother punished me, but not with a spanking. Instead, I had to stay in my room for a while and call my friend to apologize to her.

Later, my mother explained why I needed to go to daycare every day, and how worried she was when I wasn't there. I learned why I was being punished; if I had simply been spanked, I don't think I would have learned the same lesson.

Punishment is supposed to teach children why their behavior was wrong. Spanking doesn't do that because it only communicates to the children that they did something wrong. It doesn't actually teach a lesson. In fact, research shows the only lesson children learn from spanking is that violence is a good solution to problems; it teaches them to resort to violence in the future.

In addition to being an ineffective punishment, spanking can easily escalate into abuse. Even if parents aren't spanking out of anger and are trying to use spanking as a teaching method, sometimes they go too far. Many parents admit they don't realize how hard they have hit their children until they see the bruises they have created.

Spanking a child does nothing to teach. Children will learn much more quickly if they are told ``No" instead of being smacked. Good parenting should focus on positive reinforcement, instead of abuse.

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KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

Juvenile-home resident ordered to be held in jail until sentenced

Saturday, August 12, 2006

lturner@kalamazoogazette.com 388-8564

A 15-year-old Kalamazoo boy who escaped from the Kalamazoo County Juvenile Home in June by jumping from a second-story window was moved Friday into the Kalamazoo County Jail after staff members at the youth facility found sharp metal pieces in his possession.

Kalamazoo County Circuit Judge Richard Ryan Lamb ordered Myquan Deantae Rogers to be held in the jail until sentencing, scheduled for Aug. 21, following a request from juvenile home Superintendent Frank Weichlein.

After his June 6 escape, Rogers -- who has pleaded guilty as an adult to two counts of assault with intent to commit murder and faces eight to 20 years in prison -- eluded authorities for 13 days before being reapprehended.

Weichlein said Rogers banged on his bedroom door Friday until four screws popped out of a bottom hinge and three metal plates, about 1.5-by-4.5 inches, fell out of the door. Rogers tried to hide the metal pieces, but they were found as staff members searched his belongings before moving him to another room.

"Our belief is that he was going to use them on staff," Weichlein told the judge.

Rogers, bound in leg and belly shackles, disputed Weichlein's version of events. Lamb said he found Rogers' actions a "menace" to juvenile-home staff members and others in the facility when he ordered the move.

State law allows for juveniles age 15 or older to be held in jail for no more than 30 days, but they must be housed away from the adult population.

Lt. Gail Sampsell of the Kalamazoo County Sheriff's Department said two side-by-side one-prisoner cells would be cleared, and Rogers would be placed in one of them.

"There will be no verbal, visible or physical contact (with other jail inmates)," she said. "Only officers on duty will be allowed on the catwalk (in front of the cells)."

Voters on Tuesday approved a millage to fund the construction of a new juvenile home. The current facility is 70 years old and, Weichlein said, falling apart.

"I don't like putting kids in jail and neither do the judges but this is scary stuff," he said of the sharp metal pieces.

Rogers is the second juvenile-home resident to be lodged in the county jail in about 18 months, Weichlein said.

Lansing State Journal

August 14, 2006

Juvenile programs to get \$1.9M

The Michigan Department of Human Services will receive more than \$1.9 million from the federal Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention for juvenile justice improvements, the office of U.S. Rep. Mike Rogers, R-Brighton, announced last week. The money may be used for substance abuse prevention, violent crime prevention and treatment programs.

Planned Medicaid Cuts Cause Rift With States

By [ROBERT PEAR](#)

Published: August 13, 2006

WASHINGTON, Aug. 12 — The White House is clashing with governors of both parties over a plan to cut Medicaid payments to hospitals and nursing homes that care for millions of low-income people.

The White House says the changes are needed to ensure the “fiscal integrity” of Medicaid and to curb “excessive payments” to health care providers.

But the plan faces growing opposition. The [National Governors Association](#) said it “would impose a huge financial burden on states,” already struggling with explosive growth in health costs.

More than 330 members of Congress, including 103 [Republicans](#), have objected to the plan. A letter signed by 82 House Republicans says it “would seriously disrupt financing of Medicaid programs around the country.” A bipartisan group of 50 senators recently urged President Bush to scrap the proposed rules, which were set forth in his 2007 budget and could be issued before the end of this year.

Medicaid finances health care for more than 50 million low-income people, with money provided by the federal government and the states.

Under the White House plan, the federal government would reduce Medicaid payments to many public hospitals and nursing homes by redefining allowable costs. It would also limit the states’ ability to finance their share of Medicaid by imposing taxes on health care providers. About two-thirds of the states have such taxes.

The federal government pays at least 50 percent of Medicaid costs in each state and more than 70 percent in the poorest states. Bush administration officials say states have used creative bookkeeping and accounting gimmicks to obtain large amounts of federal Medicaid money without paying their share. Moreover, they contend, some states have improperly recycled federal money to claim additional federal Medicaid money.

“States have managed to draw down more federal Medicaid dollars with fewer state dollars,” said Dennis G. Smith, director of the federal Center for Medicaid and State Operations.

State and local officials, members of Congress, hospitals, nursing homes and advocates for poor people make several arguments. First, they say, Mr. Bush is doing by regulation what he unsuccessfully asked Congress to do by legislation in the last two years. Second, they say, prior administrations and the Bush administration itself approved many of the state taxes that would be deemed improper under the new rules.

Gov. [Arnold Schwarzenegger](#) of California, a Republican, said, “The administration is attempting to reverse decades of federal Medicaid policy through the regulatory process,” less than a year after “Congress rejected these misguided cuts.”

In Missouri, Gov. Matt Blunt, a Republican, said the change “could mean a loss of more than \$84.9 million” for his state. That, he said, would “jeopardize the continuity of care for Medicaid recipients” and set back efforts to improve care in nursing homes.

Gov. [M. Jodi Rell](#) of Connecticut, a Republican, protested the White House plan in a letter to Mr. Bush. She said the effects would be “disastrous” in states like Connecticut, which relies on fees collected from nursing homes to help pay its share of Medicaid costs.

Democratic governors, including Janet Napolitano of Arizona, [Edward G. Rendell](#) of Pennsylvania and Kathleen Sebelius of Kansas, also denounced the White House plan. Ms. Sebelius said the cuts would make it much more difficult for health care providers like the [University of Kansas](#) Hospital to serve Medicaid recipients and people without insurance.

The cuts contemplated by the White House would not reduce the cost of care. But state officials said the changes would put pressure on states to reduce Medicaid benefits, restrict eligibility or lower payments to health care providers.

Medicaid is one of the largest, fastest-growing items in state budgets. To pay their share of the costs, states often rely on general revenue from sales and income taxes. But many also levy special taxes on hospitals, nursing homes and other health care providers. In many cases, providers willingly pay such taxes because the revenue shores up Medicaid and can be used by states to obtain federal matching payments.

Under current rules, a state can impose a tax equal to 6 percent of the revenue of a hospital or nursing home. The administration wants to lower the allowable tax rate to 3 percent. The federal government would reduce its Medicaid payment to any state that levied taxes above that.

[Michael O. Leavitt](#), the secretary of health and human services, said this change would “remove incentives for states to shift the responsibility to fund their share of the Medicaid program to health care providers.” Hospitals and nursing homes, he said, should welcome the change because it would reduce their taxes.

But Thomas P. Nickels, senior vice president of the American Hospital Association, and Bruce A. Yarwood, president of the American Health Care Association, a trade group for nursing homes, said the plan was simply a way to cut Medicaid.

“If provider taxes are cut, the Medicaid program will be reduced, and that will harm beneficiaries,” Mr. Nickels said. “We do not see a political will, at the federal or state level, to supplant provider taxes with other types of revenue.”

In February, Mr. Bush signed a bill that gave states power to revamp Medicaid by altering eligibility and benefits. That measure is expected to cut the growth of federal Medicaid spending by \$4.9 billion over five years. The White House estimates that the new rules will save the federal government even more: \$12.2 billion over five years.

The administration said it needed to impose stricter limits on Medicaid payments to public hospitals and nursing homes because such payments far exceeded “the actual cost of services” in many states.

The changes may seem technical. But Marvin R. O’Quinn, president of Jackson Health System in Miami, said they would directly and adversely affect patients.

Dr. Bruce A. Chernof, director of the Los Angeles County Department of Health Services, said the cuts would “reduce access to services in a county where 33 percent of residents are uninsured.” The county’s five public hospitals operate trauma centers and burn treatment units for all patients, not just Medicaid recipients, he said.

The effects are magnified by the way Medicaid is financed. For each dollar that a state loses in provider tax revenue, the federal government will reduce its contributions — by \$1 in California and Connecticut, and by \$3 in a poor state like Mississippi.

The White House said Mr. Bush would also adopt stricter policies on Medicaid payments for rehabilitation and school-based health services.



Human Services director rose through ranks to take helm

GENESEE COUNTY

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Monday, August 14, 2006

By Ron Fonger

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GENESEE COUNTY - Two days after 5-year-old Rose Kelley died in what investigators called one of the area's worst cases of child neglect, Sheryl Thompson took over the agency that some blamed for allowing it to happen.

The new director of the county office of the state Department of Human Services barely had time to unpack before her first crisis was in full bloom.

DHS' Child Protective Services division had been in contact with Rose's family twice before she died in squalor in her parents' lice- and flea-infested home.

Thompson was left to answer why social workers hadn't done more to protect Rose and other children in the house without violating DHS policy of not commenting on specific cases.

The agency contends state law forbids it to comment without a subpoena or court order.

"I had been used to dealing with these type (crises)," said Thompson, a Flint native who rose quickly through the ranks at DHS, working in child protection and foster care, spending time on the street and in administrative positions since 1987.

Since Rose's death, Thompson's boss, state Director Marianne Udow, has committed to open the results of a DHS internal investigation of its handling of Rose's case.

But Thompson's handling of the situation in the meantime has earned her praise. She wasn't invited but still attended a state House Special Committee on Child Protection hearing last week and met with a local advisory board after the death, promising to talk to every state employee who had contact with Rose's family to find out everything she could.

Former state Rep. Vera B. Rison, a member of an advisory board for the county DHS office, said Thompson's coming up through the ranks and being from Flint are both pluses.

"I liked Sheryl before this. I knew her mom before she was born," said Rison. "I was impressed with her because she appeared to know her job, and she had a commitment to it.

QUICK TAKE

About Sheryl Thompson

- POST: Genesee County Department of Human Services director
- AGE: 43
- HOMETOWN: Flint
- EDUCATION: Flint Southwestern Academy graduate; bachelor and master's degrees from Central Michigan University
- PERSONAL: Married; two sons
- OUTLOOK: "We've got to work together as a community. Our caseworkers do their very best. I tell them, 'Do the best you can do while you are out there, (but) we cannot be in a home 24 hours a day, seven days a week.'"

"This is her community. She knows it."

Rose's case wasn't that different from hundreds that Thompson has been involved in as a caseworker. She's also checked on the status of foster children, investigated complaints of child abuse and neglect, and handled paternity cases.

The Flint Southwestern Academy graduate always wanted to be a social worker, even after hiring into a salaried position at General Motors right out of college.

She took a pay cut to work for CPS in an entry-level position and survived the burnout that claims many state caseworkers.

"I've gone into homes for (complaints that it's) dirty and see (much worse) -a switch on the table and drugs," she said. "The last house call I went on, I pulled up to the house, and police and paramedics (were already there).

"I heard the screaming going on, glass breaking, and I had to remove the kids. It's heart-breaking. You learned by trial and error."

With 580 employees, DHS' county office is more than just CPS. Thompson also oversees programs that provide cash and food assistance, day care assistance and adult foster care.

But cases like Rose's and those where children are victims of extreme abuse attract the most attention.

Just weeks into her job, Thompson announced formation of a specialized team to handle cases of sexual and severe physical abuse, and she plans to kick off a Family to Family program in September that's designed to place children who are taken from their homes with one permanent and stable family in the child's own community.

"We need to hear what we could do differently," Thompson said of the initiative. "We need to hear from our parents and foster parents (about) what we can do to help."

Thompson said that being from Flint, raised with her sister in a single-parent household, has helped give her a different perspective as director.

She's not just a state bureaucrat - she's the vice president of the Parent Advisory Council at Southwestern and president of its booster club. Her husband, Wendell, is assistant pastor of Holbrook Church of God in Flint.

"A lot of times we ride through the city, looking to see what's changed and what's going on," she said. "I enjoy interacting with people. ... I'm looking at this as an opportunity to reach out."

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It Should Not Cost More to Be Poor

August 14, 2006

Being poor is not cheap. People who live in low-income areas of urban America pay more for many things.

That's not shocking news. But it is surprising just how much more goods and services cost the people who are least able to afford it. The so-called "ghetto tax" is detailed in a new report from the Brookings Institute, "From Poverty, Opportunity," available at

www.brook.edu/metro/pubs/20060718_povop.html. The

report makes clear that the conventional strategy for fighting poverty, demanding jobs for the poor, is an inadequate remedy unless paired with protection against price gouging on everything from furniture to mortgages.

Doubters should add up the numbers, as Brookings scholar Matt Fellowes did. He crunched national data, as well as information from 12 cities from across the country. Regrettably, Detroit didn't make the list, although anyone who lives or has lived in the city knows that the findings are, if anything, even more so for Detroiters.

High-cost mortgages			
Here's a look at the share of high-cost mortgages, as defined by the Federal Reserve Board, in Detroit, the region and the state.			
Household income	Michigan	Detroit	Metro Detroit
Less than \$30,000	28.95	53.44	41.49
\$30,000-\$45,000	24.57	55.62	37.36
\$45,000-\$60,000	21.09	55.25	33.20
\$60,000-\$75,000	16.80	52.40	27.67
\$75,000-\$90,000	13.95	49.91	22.39
\$90,000-\$105,000	11.83	47.81	19.99
Above \$105,000	8.06	28.90	13.56
TOTAL	18.01	50.60	28.99
Source: Matt Fellowes, the Brookings Institute, Analysis of 2004 Federal Reserve Data			

The research shows, for example, that about 4.5 million lower-income families pay at least two percentage points more in loan interest rates than families with incomes of \$60,000-\$90,000 -- 9.2% APR compared to 7.2%. The same disparity was found in first mortgages. In 2004, the average APR was about 6.9% for low-income households, compared to 6% for households with incomes of \$60,000 or more.

"We've got to be thinking more about what happens to poor people's income, how much more they have to pay for everything," Fellowes said in an interview.

By his estimate, cutting the costs of essential goods and services in urban America by just 1% would put as much as \$6.5 billion in the pockets of low-income consumers.

That number alone should be enough to ignite a new debate about addressing poverty in this country.

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News Release

Contact: Stepheni Schlinker or Maureen Sorbet (517) 373-7394

Barry County DHS Announces New Approach to Foster Care ***"Family to Family" Keeps Foster Care Kids in their Schools and Communities***

August 14, 2006

HASTINGS – For many years, foster children in Michigan were often placed outside of their own communities and moved multiple times while in care. There is substantial research indicating that children in foster care who have frequent contact with their birth parents, remain in their schools, and continue their existing friendship and family networks, have a higher rate of successful reunification with their birth parents.

"Children are our most precious resource," Governor Jennifer M. Granholm said. "It is critical that we work together to do everything we can not only to ensure the safety of our children, but also to provide them with a stable environment in which they are surrounded by adults who care about them and will help them learn and grow."

That is why the Michigan Department of Human Services is working to implement a child welfare reform initiative called Family to Family in every county in the state. The goal of Family to Family is to place children who must be removed from their families with one permanent and stable family in the child's own community until reunification with birth families can occur or until the child is released for adoption.

The Family to Family initiative has already been successfully implemented in several counties across the state, including Barry County. Family to Family is a partnership between the local Department of Human Services and the community to reduce disruption in the lives of at-risk children. This approach ensures that birth parents, foster parents and community representatives are involved in the decision-making process concerning the placement and service needs of at-risk children.

In an effort to help Barry County residents better understand the Family to Family initiative, the Barry County Department of Human Services is hosting a community forum on August 14, 2006 from 9:30 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. at Hastings Church of The Nazarene, 1716 N., Broadway, in Hastings.

This event will feature foster parents and former foster children speaking about their experience with the child welfare system as well as parents who have been or are currently involved in the state's child welfare system. Additionally, several Barry County community human service agencies will be present with information about the services they provide.

-MORE-

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"When children are placed in foster care they often do not understand what has happened and why they cannot live with their parents," Marianne Udow, Michigan Department of Human Services director, said.

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“When we ask children where they want to be, no matter how dysfunctional their family is, the children overwhelmingly say they want to live with their family. With the Family to Family approach we are able to keep kids in their own neighborhoods and communities by placing them with extended family or kin. The less disruption children encounter, the easier it will be for them to succeed in school and in life.”

The Family to Family model protects children by:

- ☐ Increasing family involvement and investment in developing safety and service plans for their children.
- ☐ Utilizing extended family, kin and community-based resources to support the family and monitor the safety of the children.
- ☐ Providing better information to DHS staff to ensure that all safety issues are addressed and back-up plans are available.
- ☐ Keeping the children in the community, their school and with siblings who know what is “normal” for the child and will be alert to any changes that may signal problems.
- ☐ Greater use of individualized services to meet the unique needs of a particular family.

For more information about the Family to Family initiative, visit the Michigan Department of Human Services Web site at www.michigan.gov/dhs.

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JENNIFER M. GRANHOLM
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MICHIGAN
MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
LANSING

MARIANNE UDOW
DIRECTOR

News Release

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Midwest region annual food assistance conference to be held in Grand Rapids

August 14, 2006

LANSING — The U. S. Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Service and the Michigan Department of Human Services are hosting the 16th Annual Midwest Region "Big Ten" Food Assistance Program Improvement Conference August 16-18 at the Amway Grand Plaza Hotel in Grand Rapids. The conference is hosted by a different state each year.

The annual conference features speakers on topics including customer service, reducing work within the workload, maintaining high performance with reduced staffing, and the importance of good case documentation.

"It is critical that the program be operated as effectively as possible," DHS Director Marianne Udow said. "Conferences such as this provide the opportunity for staff to share proven strategies and to create new potentially effective strategies that will improve the operation of the Food Assistance Program from both integrity and service perspectives."

The Food Assistance Program provides support to needy households and to those making the transition to self-sufficiency. The program enables low-income families to buy nutritious food with Electronic Benefits Transfer cards.

The Food Assistance Program serves a range of low-income people including families with children, elderly, and people with disabilities. Approximately 80 percent of recipients live in households with children while 31 percent live in households with an elderly or disabled household member.

"Our goal is to ensure that we are doing all we can to protect Michigan's families," said Marianne Udow, director of the Department of Human Services. "Ensuring that families and children have food on their tables is a critical element in that mission."

Michigan DHS administered federally funded food benefits to 523,055 households in June 2006, representing nearly 1.15 million individuals. The Midwest agencies participating in this conference annually each issue more than \$10 million in food benefits. Since 2000, participating agencies have attributed over \$120.3 million in savings or cost avoidance to initiatives learned at "Big Ten" conferences.

In Michigan, The Food Assistance Program supplements the food purchasing power of low-income individuals and families. The U.S. Department of Agriculture pays for 100 percent of program benefits. The state and federal governments share administrative costs. Department of Human Services' staff members statewide determine eligibility for applicants.

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The Food Assistance Program was formerly called food stamps.

For more information go to www.michigan.gov/dhs

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